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Service Learning at UMM: Meeting community needs and course goals

Summary:

(October 26, 2004)-By Jackie Thrasher '06, UMM News Service assistant, and Addie Motzko '07, service learning ambassador

University of Minnesota, Morris professor Rujira Rojjanaprapayon (rue-jee'ra rot-jana-prah'-pah-yon) is offering students in his Interpersonal Communication course a chance to participate in activities for elderly residents who reside at Grandview Apartments in Morris. When asked why he decided to offer the project to his students, he replied, "I would like students to try something outside of class. It's part of interpersonal communication because it will help students deal with people of different backgrounds and perspectives."

Students will work in pairs and meet with their elderly partners over the course of the semester. Students will then write a reflective essay about the experience in place of a research paper.

"[The project] will broaden the perspectives of students as well as those who are involved, including the Morris community and even me who is from another culture," said Rojjanaprapayon, who is originally from Thailand. At the end of this project, students will give their presentation to the class and then the community.

Beginning in 2006, Rojjanaprapayon plans to offer the same opportunity to his students in an upper-level interpersonal communications course.

Service learning at UMM is the integration of community service into the curriculum. In a service learning course, faculty, students, and community partners engage in a project that meets community needs and provides students with the opportunity to apply knowledge and skills learned in the course to real-world challenges.

Other service learning opportunities open to students during fall semester include:

Aging, Adulthood and Death, taught by Andy Hostetler, will bring students and elders together to discuss current issues related to aging in our community. After the discussions students and elders will develop a project that meets the needs of elders in this community.

Therese Buchmiller's Photography class will visit local sustainable farms and take photos of the farmers. In collaboration, Argie Manolis' Fundamentals of Writing class will interview the farmers and write short pieces about each local farmer. These photos and writing pieces will be shown at the Local Foods Meal, to be held at UMM on November 4 and at other locations following. The goal of this project is to educate the community about the importance of sustainable agriculture.

Students in College Writing and Fundamentals of Writing, also taught by Manolis, will plan and implement weekly

activities for elders living at West Wind Village.

Jennifer Rothchild's Sociology of Deviance class will meet with troubled youth and will interview each other about their life history. There will be a celebration at the end of the project. Sociology of Gender, also taught by Rothchild, will create a curriculum to be adopted for a mentoring program for middle and high school students.

Paula O'Loughlin's American Government class will work on a voter registration drive on campus, in the community, or assist with the Kid's Voting Program that educates kids about voting and provides them with a way to cast and count votes on Election Day.

Service Learning is a program of the Faculty Center for Learning and Teaching at UMM. The program supports course-based projects that meet both community needs and course goals. Last year more than 700 students, community members, and faculty participated in the program, which is funded in part by a federal grant from Learn and Serve America. For further information, contact Argie Manolis, Service Learning coordinator, at 589-6257 or at manolis@mrs.umn.edu.

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